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## VIETNAMESE BUDDHISM IN FERMENT -- PART II THE BUDDHA, THE DHARMA AND THE SANGHA

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This is a research report, not a statement of Agency policy

SUMMARY

The recent Buddhist political agitation in Vietnam has been supported by only a small minority of the Buddhist monks. Many monks and laymen consider aggressive political activities contrary to Buddhist doctrine. The activists' objectives are unclear but appear aimed at achieving a democratically elected, Buddhist-dominated government which would probably seek to negotiate a neutralist solution to the war. Buddhists claim to fear repression in the name of anti-Communism which they associate with the Catholics who were favored under the French and the Diem governments. While Buddhists pronouncements sometimes appear illogical to westerners, modern Buddhism has irrevocably carried the monk into the affairs of society.

Vietnamese Buddhism is an amalgam of Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and animism. Buddhist revere the Three Jewels: the Buddha founder, the dharma or doctrine and the sangha or clergy. Both major Buddhist schools are followed, Mahayana among ethnic Vietnamese and Therevada among ethnic Cambodians.

The doctrines of Buddha derived from Hinduism which includes the belief in a world soul, in reincarnation and in the doctrine of karma, the balance of good and evil accumulated by each soul. Buddha taught the world is material which is in constant flux. With no personal God there are no miracles. Salvation results from the elimination of self by following Buddha's Four Noble Truths and Eightfold path. Most Vietnamese follow either contemplative Zen or the simpler Pure Land form of Mahayana. In popular practice, Vietnamese Buddhists worship numerous Buddhas, deities and spirits drawn from many sources.

Traditionally Vietnam's pagodas were locally controlled. Monastic standards have been lax and the monk's social and educational levels low. Despite recent reforms, most monks know little beyond the more common prayers, ceremonies and folk lore. Associations of monks and laymen formed to improve standards have published religious literature and are operating schools and social services. Most of these groups were united in 1964. While political activism by some monks has partly disrupted this unity, Buddhism has become a powerful political force.

BUDDHIST RELIGION
SOUTH VIETNAM

CONTENTS

# VIETNAMESE BUDDHISM IN FERMENT -- PART II
# THE BUDDHA, THE DHARMA AND THE SANGHA

## BUDDHISM AND SYNCRETISM

A modern western scholar once said that Buddhism, like any other form of truth, varies with the individual and grows with him, but "only the Buddha fully understood Buddhism." If Buddhism varies with the individual, it more certainly varies with nations. Buddhists of one country may honestly ask of the Buddhism of another, "Is this Buddhism?" Dr. Mai Tho Truyen, foremost lay Buddhist scholar in South Vietnam, wrote in 1959, "In principle one counts three religions in Vietnam: Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism. In fact there exists only a single religion which is a form resulting from the interaction of the three doctrines ... each of which may be considered as a particular aspect of the combination." To these three, Dr. Truyen might have added a fourth, animism, the accretion of ancient rites and spirit worship descended from pre-historic times. This amalgam of religions in Vietnam is thus often called syncretism.

While Buddhist political and social agitations of recent years have increased awareness of Buddhism, the average Vietnamese still does not necessarily consider himself a Buddhist because he occasionally seeks Buddha's aid. Neither does he consider himself Taoist or Confucian or animist because he consults a Taoist priest, makes offerings to his ancestors, or burns incense to some spirits of nature. While he has vague ideas of the concepts of karma and of the numerous heavens and hells and deities of Mahayana Buddhism, he is not always aware they are Buddhist, so completely are they mingled with other religious ideas. He usually has little reason to segregate traditional religious practices and beliefs. Withal, Buddhism is a rapidly growing force which needs to be examined separately from the other regions of South Vietnam.

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[1] This is the second of two reports on the Buddhist ferment in Vietnam. The first (R-81-66), subtitled "Monks, Students and Generals," dealt with the Buddhist's political activities and some of the factions and personalities involved.

# THE THREE JEWELS IN VIETNAM

Buddhists everywhere revere the Three Jewels of Buddhism: the Buddha who founded the faith, the dharma or the doctrines, and the sangha or Buddhist clergy. Beyond this we find innumerable differences. Interpretations of the dharma probably are more diverse than the interpretations of Christianity around the world. The two major branches of Buddhism are Mahayana and Therevada (Hinayana). Mahayana is the leading form in Vietnam, China, Korea and Japan. Therevada is found mainly in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia and among Cambodian-speaking Vietnamese. In addition to practicing several sects of Mahayana and Therevada, Vietnamese have originated Hoa Hao, a new Buddhist cult, and an eclectic creed, Cao Dai, that mingles Buddhism with elements of Christianity, Hinduism and Chinese religious beliefs. Both the Hoa Hao and the Cao Dai have divided into several sub-sects. The varieties of religious orders among the sangha are as numerous as the sects.

The Three Jewels were probably carried to Vietnam with Indian traders enroute to China before the time of Christ. By the third century A.D., Northern Vietnam had become an important intermediary center where Buddhist doctrines were translated into Chinese and pilgrims could study before going to India. The Thien or Zen (dhyana) sect which predominated through most of Vietnam's history, arrived around the sixth century A.D. In recent decades, Zen has been supplanted in popularity by the simpler Tinh or Pure Land (Amida) sect. In practice, the two may coexist in the same pagoda without conflict, since educated Buddhists look at Pure Land as a beginner's Buddhism and a preparation for the more difficult Zen.

Both Thien and Tinh belong to the Mahayana branch. Their active active adherents in Vietnam are estimated variously at from three to six million of the country's 17 million people while an equal number may be nominal Buddhists. Around 400,000 Cambodian-speaking Therevada Buddhists are found mainly in the southern delta. The Hoa Hao and Cao Dai each claim over one million followers, while Vietnamese Catholics number about 1,500,000 and Protestants perhaps 150,000. Most of the 700,000 mountain-dwelling tribesmen practice animism. Other Vietnamese are likely to describe their religion as ancestor veneration.

# THE BUDDHA

Therevada Buddhists believe there was only one Buddha, the historic founder of the faith who taught there was no God. Mahayanists believe the historic Buddha had many reincarnations and that others also have achieved enlightenment or bodhi. These may be called Buddhas, bodhisattvas or ahrats, according to the degree of their enlightenment. Most popular among Vietnamese is Amida (A-di-da). In addition, Mahayanists worship a pantheon of gods and goddesses derived from Indian and Chinese mythology and believe in numerous heavens and hells. Best known of the deities is Kwan Yin (Quan The Am), a goddess of mercy, who serves a function similar to that of the Madonna among Catholics. Despite the proliferation of Buddhas and other deities, the historic founder of the faith retains great importance to all Buddhists. The myriad of legends that have built up around the scanty facts known of his life make it difficult to separate fact from fiction.

According to these stories, Buddha was born around 500 B.C. as a prince named Siddhartha in what is now Nepal. Siddhartha came to be known by many names: Gautama after his family name; Sakyamuni, prophetic sage of the Sakya clan; the Buddha, after he achieved bodhi or enlightenment; and Tathagata, the Perfect One.

Siddhartha grew to manhood as a pampered prince, shielded from the harsher realities of life. After marrying a beautiful princess who bore him a son, Siddhartha developed an awareness of some of life's unpleasant aspects -- hunger, disease, pain, old age and death. Finally, a holy man inspired him to search for the meaning of life. He deserted his family and palace to become a wandering ascetic. For years he relentlessly sought truth, trying all the accepted forms of self-denial and self-torture. When these brought only dull blankness he turned to other methods, finally trying extended meditation sitting under a tree. Through meditation, enlightenment came; in an intuitive flash he learned the path to truth -- to bodhi.

Having achieved personal enlightenment, Siddhartha was tempted to keep his knowledge secret to avoid the task of explaining the complex doctrine to others. But, compelled by compassion for suffering mankind, the Buddha turned back to lead his fellow men with him on the path to nirvana. For forty years he taught throughout India. As he died at the age of 80 in the arms of his favored disciple Ananda, he said, "Decay is inherent in all compound things. Work out your own salvation with diligence."

The man Siddhartha and his doctrine were products of Indian civilization. Indians believed all life was related -- "Out of Brahma the creator all things come -- to Brahma all things return." Brahma the unknown and unknowable was the source of reality, of knowledge and bliss. Out of this world soul or consciousness comes the individual soul, that of the insect or of man, receiving temporary consciousness of self (atman) at birth. In earthly life the soul builds a good or bad character and leads a good or bad life. The balance of this accumulation of good or evil is called one's karma and this determines at what level of life the soul will be reborn in the next reincarnation. Karma is an eternal moral law of cause and effect. What a man sows in evil deeds he must reap in suffering in this life or another. The ultimate goal of this cycle of life and death is nirvana, the extinction of individual existence through reunification with Brahma. The secrets of the doctrine were a closely-held monopoly of the highest Indian caste, the priestly Brahmans. As a member of the second caste, Gautama's teachings represented a rebellion against Hinduism's caste-ridden monopoly of salvation.

Gautama spread his doctrine widely during his long life and his disciples continued his work. Over the centuries, Buddhism expanded over much of Asia. Hinduism eventually reconquered most of India, while Islam won Pakistan, Malaya and Indonesia. More recently, though Communism has given a severe blow to Buddhism in China, North Korea and North Vietnam, Buddhism remains a vital force to hundreds of millions.

During its early expansion, Buddhism split into two major schools. Mahayana (the greater vehicle) is so called because its adherents consider it the fuller road to salvation. Therevada (The Way of the Elders) is called Hinayana by its opponents to imply that it does not teach the full doctrine. In part, the difference arises out of the fact that for centuries after Buddha's death his teachings were handed down orally. No single text or canon sums up the basic teachings as do the Bible or the Koran for Christianity and Islam. Therevada Buddhists base their creed upon the earliest collection of scriptures known as the Tripitika, the "Three Baskets" of the law, first recorded about 80 B.C. Therevadists accept the Tripitika as the original and only teachings of the one and only Buddha, much as Protestant Christians accept the New Testament as the whole teaching of Christ. The Mahayanists, believing in numerous Buddhas and boddhisattvas, accept other sources of religious truth as well as the Tripitika. Later religious writings may be equally valid. In this respect, Mahayanists may be compared to the Catholics who believe miracles did not end with Christ and who accept the writings of St. Augustine or St. Thomas Aquinas as divinely inspired.

Both Mahayana and Therevada Buddhism have developed in different ways in different countries, and Vietnamese Buddhism is unique to that country though it has borrowed heavily from Chinese Buddhism.

## THE DHARMA

It has been said that Buddha taught ethics and philosophy, not religion. He believed the world was material in constant change -- all things are becoming, nothing is immutable. Life does not die but passes on to new forms of energy. There is no permanent soul. That which one calls self is but a bundle of sense perceptions and consciousness bound together temporarily by the material body which is itself a collection of minute material bodies. The cement for both dissolves with death. There is no personal God, only the unchanging eternal reality, a form of world soul which the Hindu calls Brahma. Buddha spoke of other distant universes and of micro-organisms too small to be seen. Buddha said there was no God, but man made a god of Buddha.

At the core of Buddhism as it is commonly practiced is the gospel of universal salvation. Buddha taught that with enlightenment comes the realization of the oneness of all life. Individual salvation cannot be achieved while one clings to a consciousness of one's individuality. Only by eliminating this self-consciousness can one master one's karma and become completely detached from life. One then achieves nirvana, unification with the universal mind or world soul which is the source and the end of all things.

In his famous sermon at Benares, Buddha explained the essence of his path to salvation through the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path: (1) existence is suffering; (2) suffering springs from selfish desire or craving; (3) to end suffering one must end desire; (4) to end desire, one must follow the Eightfold Path of conduct whose steps are right understanding, right effort, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right intentions, right mindedness, and right concentration. Buddha defined rightness by offering Five Moral Rules of conduct: do not kill any living being, do not steal, do not lie, do not drink intoxicants and do not be unchaste.

Basically, Buddha taught an ethical, pragmatic way. Since there is no personal God, only an impersonal world soul, there can be no miracles. There is no requirement to worship and no hope for supernatural help in human affairs. Each person is concerned with

individual salvation, but the goal is the elimination of self. Technically, prayers are not made to any deity but are a form of contemplation or a mental exercise. Buddha said, "By oneself is the evil done, by oneself one suffers -- by oneself is evil left undone, by oneself one is purified."

Despite the emphasis upon personal salvation, there is a tradition of service. Instead of going on to nirvana, Buddha turned back to help mankind after achieving enlightenment. This tradition justified the recent growth of social action -- the development of clinics, schools, libraries -- and by extension, political action. A doctrine of social and political action was recently expounded at length in book, Engaged Buddhism, by Thich Nhat Hanh, head of the School for Youth for Social Service of the new Van Hanh Buddhist University in Saigon. The new social and political activism follows a trend that has been underway for several decades in Vietnam although it captured widespread attention only in recent years. Now it is giving Vietnamese Buddhism an explosive vitality that sometimes outreaches the degree of discipline and organization created to control and channel it.

Within this tradition Vietnam's activist Buddhists find justification for self-immolation, dying for the greater good of man and the faith. The concept of self-burning, symbolizing the new approach, was explained by Thich Nhat Hanh in a pamphlet in 1965. All monks, he said, ceremonially burn themselves in one or more body areas during their ordination to show the seriousness with which they take their monastic vows. Suicide to eliminate oneself for personal reasons is a serious sin, but burning oneself as a self-sacrifice for the well-being of the faith is a constructive act performed for mankind.

In all lands religions operate on at least two levels, the abstract theological or philosophical level of the scholars and theologians and the practical or common level of the mass of the faithful. With Vietnamese Buddhism, these levels differ widely. To a degree, the difference between them is represented by the two popular sects of Mahayana. Zen is practiced mainly by monks and educated laymen, while the majority of the people follow Pure Land Buddhism.

The word Thien or Zen comes from the Sanskrit dhyana, meaning intense meditation to achieve enlightenment. The sect derives from the belief that Buddha passed through a series of dhyana or meditative trances before achieving enlightenment. Zen rejects reliance on scripture study, rituals, vows or prayers. It is a form of philosophical nihilism. According to Zen, ideas and religious practices are like eggs that must be broken to be eaten. Truth is

found in personal experience, not in books or ritual. Adherents must live a life of self discipline, moderation and kindness in all things. But all things and every impression must be questioned in the search for enlightenment through intuitive insights that are beyond explanation by rational speech. Enlightenment comes like a bolt of lightening.

While the Zen Buddhist believes "There is no doctrine which can be taught ... The way can not be studied," a teacher can help the student achieve his breakthrough to personal enlightenment. Zen masters do this by using paradoxical questions that can only be answered intuitively. This non-rational use of words leads to an ambiguity of expression among Zen adherents that can baffle the uninitiated, as Western reporters have discovered. The technique arises from the story that Buddha communicated only partial insights to his disciples, as much as each could comprehend. The purpose was to lead them through stages of intuitive understanding to the point at which they might achieve full enlightenment.

Contemplative devotional exercises play little or no part in the Buddhism of the common man who follows a variety of Pure Land Buddhism. Zen in its higher forms is closer to Therevada than to Pure Land or Amida Buddhism which represents Mahayana in its more elaborate forms. Amida involves a philosophical idealism. At the core of ultimate reality is the compassionate wisdom and infinite love of the Amida or Amitabha Buddha, a king who gave up his throne to follow Buddha. While seeking enlightenment Amida made a series of forty vows. Among these was a promise that if he achieved enlightenment, he would assist to the Pure Land or western Paradise all who called upon his name in complete faith at their death. In the Western Paradise they could pursue their ultimate perfection in more pleasant conditions than on earth.

Amida Buddhists pray regularly to the Amida Buddha and repeat his forty vows. By pleading for the mercy of Amida and the various bodhisattvas, the faithful hope to assure their passage to paradise. Amidists rely particularly on a canon called The Lotus of the Wonderful Law, but there is very little emphasis on the study of doctrines. Ceremonies concentrate on prayers and devotion. In practice, Amida in Vietnam includes many elements derived from Taoism, Confucianism and animism.

All Mahayana canons or sutras used in Vietnam were formerly written in Chinese, but since 1920 many have been translated and published in the Romanized Vietnamese script now studied in the schools. However, because neither Zen nor Amida requires theological scholarship, the study of the religious scriptures is not widespread. As a result, the average Vietnamese layman has very

limited knowledge or understanding of his faith. He accepts in a general way the belief in karma, in rebirth and the idea that every thought or action brings inevitable consequences. Visits to the pagoda are rare, for they are not necessary to the practice of Buddhism. Normally, the layman prays at his family ancestral altar which may not have an image of Buddha or any other deity. In a poorer home the altar may have only a container for burning incense sticks and small symbolic offerings of food and drink for the ancestors. More prosperous homes may have separate Buddhist altars.

Mingled with the concern for the Amida Buddha and the Western Paradise in popular Buddhism is a pantheon of boddhisattvas and lesser deities and a vast array of spirits. Also, like other Vietnamese, Buddhists venerate the spirits of their ancestors. Symbolic is the story told of a Vietnamese woman who would not commit herself as to whether her new daughter-in-law was really good since this could only truly be tested after her own death. Then she would know how devoted the daughter-in-law was to her spirit. The ancestor cult has no necessary role in Amida but has blended with it in popular practice.

Beyond the spirits of the ancestors are the spirits of all dead humans and living creatures and of the various forces of nature, heaven and earth. Such spirits are of high, low and intermediate rank, rulers and ruled. They may be placated, sought out, begged from, bribed or bullied -- depending upon the spirit and the occasion. Some animistic spirits have become identified with various boddhisatvas, much as Christian saints replaced some of the deities of the ancient Roman world. The Vietnamese remain highly eclectic, adapting their beliefs to new circumstances. One Hindu temple in Saigon featuring a fertility god is much frequented by Vietnamese women desiring children, although usually women pray to Kwan Yin, who is often shown with many arms to perform all the chores asked of her. Kwan Yin also is worshiped as another form of the Amida Buddha.

Other popular deities are two Ho Phap, who guard the house or temple, and Maitreya, the Buddha of the future. Most homes have a kitchen altar dedicated to Ong Tao, the hearth god who is also the messenger who reports annually to heaven on the activities of the family. Ong Tao is especially honored at the Vietnamese New Year (Tet). Other statues seen in the pagoda may represent disciples of Buddha, various incarnations of Buddha or other figures of Buddhist mythology.

Popular Amida includes belief in a number of intermediate hells and paradises, as well as the Western Paradise. In theory, one goes to one of these between incarnations, good or bad, depending on the state of one's karma. They are usually described in somewhat materi-

alistic terms of painful and gruesome punishments or luxurious delights. By providing a simple way to escape hell and reach paradise, Amida gains much of its popular appeal. Through prayer and faith one goes to heaven, according to popular belief, although more sophisticated Amidists also stress good conduct and the other aspects of the Eightfold Path.

## THE SANGHA

The sangha or Buddhist clergy in Vietnam includes the more than 20,000 monks and 4,000 nuns who live in monastery compounds associated with the pagodas. The monks of all except two minor sects follow rules of chastity, and these two non-conforming sects are considered heretical. In most pagodas monastic discipline and organization are loose. Traditionally pagodas have been locally organized and financed and subject to little or no overall controls. Few pagodas maintained rigid admission or training requirements. The prestige of monks was low and many came from lower educational and social levels. These generalities still remain largely true particularly in rural areas.

Through most of the country there are few monks with more than a very limited understanding of Buddhist philosophy and theology. Most know little beyond the more common prayers, chants, ceremonies and Buddhist folklore, despite recent efforts to improve monastic standards. Schools are being created for the training of new monks but many young men can still enter the clergy without going through these new schools. There are numerous small pagodas, some privately owned by the monks who reside there, that are subject to no effective outside control. A young man may attach himself as a disciple to the solitary monks in these pagodas, receive virtually no training and be subject to little monastic discipline.

A young man entering some of the larger urban pagodas may fare little better, for discipline may be lax, training haphazard and communication between the monks minimal. In one such pagoda in Saigon, as recently as three years ago, individual monks showed little knowledge of the activities of the other fifty monks in the pagoda. Some seemed unaware of plans being laid for a major pagoda celebration. Training of young monks followed no regular pattern. When the senior monk was asked elementary questions about Buddhist history or doctrine he referred the visitor to another pagoda. Younger monks did not understand the differences between the main Buddhist sects and could not discuss the pagoda's organization or history or explain the significance of some of the pagoda's statues.

While they were aware of the Buddhist requirement to preserve the life of all living creatures, they seemed ignorant of the shape, size or location of Vietnam when they tried to show how Buddhism came to their country. Among the duties of these monks was the organization of neighborhood study groups to teach youths and adults about Buddhism.

The quality and training of the rural sangha is generally below that of the urban clergy, though the village monk may display certificates proving he is an authentic monk. The village monk officiates at two or three daily pagoda rituals (usually early morning and evening and sometimes at noon) and at a number of major and minor public ceremonies throughout the year. He may be called upon to perform rites at funerals, weddings and other occasions for families, usually receiving gifts for his services. Some monks, in both the villages and the urban areas, may practice folk and herb medicine, mingling these with amulets and prayers to heal the sick and exorcize evil spirits that may cause sickness and bad luck. These monks may be unwilling to discuss such practices which they recognize are catering to popular superstitions. More accepted are certain devices for finding Buddha's response to prayers and requests or for receiving his advice on personal matters. At certain pagoda ceremonies the monk burns at the altar papers on which petitioners have written requests to Buddha. To find the answer to a prayer or petition, the faithful may kneel at the altar and toss small wooden sticks into the air to see whether they fall on the flat or the round sides. More detailed answers may be received by shaking a container of long bamboo slips until one rises above the other. The monk then interprets the writing on the slip to provide the answer to the request made to Buddha. Some monks may advise on the locations and orientation of houses or graves, a practice based on Taoist principles of geomancy.

Most pagodas have one or more altars in addition to the main one, each with statues, incense burners and other ritual furnishings. The statues usually include a Sakyamuni (Thich Ca), Kuan Yin, Ho Phap and possibly several others including protecting deities, though some of these may be portrayed on pictures. One altar may be dedicated to ancestors. Some pagodas have statues representing purely local deities associated with the pagoda or village. Sometimes the pagoda is dedicated to such a deity that may have grown out of local history or mythology.

While monks of the Therevada school of Buddhism followed by the Cambodian-speaking population are required to beg for their food, the majority of monks who follow Mahayana are expected to do productive work. In practice the amount of work done may be nominal. Most pagodas and monks are dependent upon donations or income from pagoda endowments. Rural pagodas usually own land which may be rented out or farmed by the monks who also may maintain kitchen gardens. Some

monks are supported by their relatives. Few pagodas are richly endowed, for Buddhism's relatively low prestige in recent centuries has not attracted the more wealthy patrons.

The daily pagoda rites are attended only by a scattering of laymen or women, usually those with some special problem. Since prayers said at home are as effective as those said at the pagoda, most lay Buddhists go to the pagoda only for special occasions. The more elaborate monthly rites and special holy days attract more laymen. Major pagoda feasts are important events which bring out most active and nominal Buddhists, for the religious ceremonies are usually accompanied by entertainment held in the pagoda yard. Most important is Buddha's birthday, when the whole Buddhist community takes on a festive air. Houses and neighborhoods are decorated and special altars are placed in public places for outdoor ceremonies performed by leading monks. At this time many thousands of Buddhists throng to the rites held in Saigon's major market square, where a colorful temporary altar is erected and surmounted by a painted Buddha of paper mache.

Associated with many pagodas are especially devout laymen who practice part of the monastic vows. They may be leading supporters of the pagoda and regularly assist the monks in religious ceremonies.

While much remains to be done in raising the quality of the sangha and the teaching of the dharma, serious efforts to make improvements have been under way for many years. The monks of the major sects are organized into sangha associations which are working to raise standards for certifying monks. Several lay associations have been organized to publish Buddhist literature, operate schools and study groups, support pagodas and maintain clinics and orphanages and other welfare activities.

Most of the sangha and lay associations were coordinated in a national organization before the 1954 partition and thereafter those in South Vietnam formed the General Buddhist Association. Following Diem's overthrow, fourteen of the sixteen associations in the South joined in forming the Unified Buddhist Association in 1964 (UBA). The objectives of the UBA included the strengthening of Buddhist unity and activities and the improvement of monastic discipline and training. Among the results of recent Buddhist cooperation are the new Buddhist Van Hanh University where Thich Nhat Hanh's School for Youth for Social Service is training 250 select students for social and religious work in the villages. The Vien Hoa Dao, the UBA's Institute for Secular Affairs headed by Thich Tam Chau, is pressing other projects for Buddhist youth, schools, clinics and other social work. One example of such activities was the use of the pagodas as centers for the collection and distribution of relief

goods during serious floods a year ago. The Vien Hoa Dao is also trying to develop accurate records of all monks and to assure they will be able to secure adequate schooling.

The task of improving the discipline and training of the existing sangha is an enormous one, even in the cities. The work of reconstituting the clergy in the war-torn countryside will be even greater. Where the Viet Cong have ruled, the monks have had to accept Communist dictates or be killed or taken away for indoctrination. Thousands of newly trained monks will be needed to bring the faith back even to the relatively weak state that existed before the insurrection. Progress has been delayed by the heavy stress many monks have placed upon politics. This had led some observers, including some critical lay Buddhists, to believe that another important aim in creating the UBA was the organization of a powerful Buddhist political force.

There is no question that the politically active Buddhists have become an important political power, but this has been achieved at some cost to Buddhist unity and progress in spiritual matters. The use of the pagoda as a rallying point for political action and revolutionary demonstration has distracted many monks from the study of the dharma and the pursuit of enlightenment. Also it has shocked and alienated many devout laymen. The activist monks' preoccupation with politics caused the leading association of laymen to withdraw from the United Buddhist Association and to drive the political monks from a main Saigon pagoda. On the other hand, political religious activism has attracted to the pagodas many younger people who might otherwise have ignored religion in any form.

Where the sangha and Vietnamese Buddhism are now heading is not clear. The recent political agitations emanating from Hue, Vietnam's most Buddhist city, were by no means supported by all of the sangha. While many younger monks have joined in the fray, a much larger number in Saigon and the delta area have remained aloof from, if not hostile to, the "struggle" movement. As a result, most of the demonstrators led by a minority of young militant monks in Saigon have been of high school age or younger, including children from a Buddhist orphanage.

Many Buddhists in Vietnam and other Asian countries have been shocked by the political agitations the militant monks have led in the name of Buddhism. These opponents believe political action and violence are contrary to Buddhist doctrine. Even Thich Tri Quang and his fellow militants occasionally have given tacit support to this view by insisting they were concerned only with religion, and not politics. In Saigon, the United Buddhist Association has tried without complete success to curb the militants

by adopting a code of conduct forbiding political activities by monks. Thich Tam Chau, acknowledged leader of the monks who fled from the North, has particularly expressed concern over the possibilities of Communist penetration of the sangha as the monks become involved in politics. On the other hand, Thich Tam Chau has also given his support to Buddhist demands for national elections and the end of military rule but has given clear indications of his willingness to compromise and seek a non-violent solution to the problem.

Buddhism is commonly viewed as a pacifistic creed that discourages aggressiveness. Still, a few centuries ago in Japan, large armies of monks of rival Buddhist sects fought bloody battles over doctrinal difference. This type of strife has not occurred in Vietnam, but Buddhist monks did lead a number of revolutions against Vietnamese emperors in past centuries. Monks also were in the forefront of the resistance to the French conquest a century ago. During French rule, Buddhism provided an acceptable symbol of Vietnamese nationalism for many Vietnamese who did not want to risk imprisonment for anti-French political activities. Even today, many Vietnamese view Buddhism as a refuge from the penetration of unsettling Western influences.

The objectives of the political Buddhists are unclear. The leading militant monks have denied being sympathetic to Communism and insist their struggle is not Communist-inspired. They maintain they only want a democratically elected government that will recognized the "aspirations" of the people. Although they do not explain these aspirations many observers suspect the Buddhist militants hope to achieve a neutralist settlement through negotiations. The militants say they fear Buddhism will be repressed by the military government and that such repression will take place in the name of anti-communism. They appear to identify both anti-Communism and Buddhist repression with Catholicism, the religion of former President Ngo Dinh Diem. The hostility of some monks to the Catholics seems to be partly xenophobic because Buddhists look at Catholicism as a Western import. Catholicism became strong under the French and remained strong under Diem who the Buddhists believe favored Catholics and repressed Buddhism. Because of these factors, some Buddhists consider the Catholics more of a menace to Buddhism. While such Buddhists may be intellectually anti-Communist, they frequently are emotionally anti-Catholic, and to some degree, anti-foreign. As a group, the Buddhists have been less touched by western influences and tend to demonstrate more often an anti-foreignism shared with most their countrymen.

In general, it appears the militant Buddhists desire to make Buddhism the predominant political force in Vietnam as they envision it to have been centuries ago. By achieving political leadership, the Buddhists militants hope they may be able to end the fighting on some terms that will not subordinate them to Communism. While they rarely admit it openly, they appear to favor negotiations with the Viet Cong to achieve a neutralist solution to the war. Some Buddhist leaders have indicated they believe they can win over the Communists through the power of their faith. It is within the nature of Amida Buddhism to believe that faith can overcome all obstacles. Some writers have criticized this attitude as well as some of the Buddhists' actions and statements as illogical. Such criticism may be valid as far as it goes, since both Amida and Zen Buddhism are by their doctrine non-logical, if not anti-logical from the western viewpoint. But, whether the actions of the monks are logical or illogical and whether or not their current political activities will continue, Vietnam's pagodas will no longer remain merely places for quiet contemplation and prayer. Engaged Buddhism is moving forward, taking the monk into the community and the affairs of society.